

EGYPT IN 1864.

The land of Egypt, upon which the following remarks are written, consists of the cities of Alexandria and Cairo, and just so much land on either bank of the Nile as the waters of that all-fertilising stream can be induced to cover. Turn Nile water over a patch of sand, and in a few seasons it will become soil, in comparison with which, the richest uplands of Norfolk or Yorkshire are sterile and unprofitable. Neglect the tracts thus reclaimed, and in a very short time they will go back into desert; therefore, for all practical purposes, Egypt is the Nile, and the Nile is Egypt.

The land of Egypt is ruled over by twenty princes, one of whom is the Viceroy. Eighteen of the others are known as Consuls-General of European nations, but the twentieth is the most powerful of all, and his name is Bakshesh. Very little, indeed, can be done in the land without the aid or countenance of Bakshesh: he is the great ruling power. Not a bale of goods can enter the country without his leave, not a handful of cotton can leave it without paying him tribute. Do you want to set up a steam-engine, to build a house, to hire a lighter, to send goods by railway, to do something that you have no right to do, to get something which you have no right to get? — why, then invoke Bakshesh, offer up a proper quantity of piastres on his shrine, and the thing is done. Imagine that you can get on without his aid, and you will soon find out your mistake. Put your faith in his brother princes, and see how you will fare. Bakshesh will stop you in the corridor as you approach the august presence, and if he frown, small profit will spring from your interview. Dodge past him, get your order, your permit, your judgment, concession, or what not, and the day of submission is but postponed. You can call spirits from the vasty deep, but will they come? Can you put what you have gained into execution without the aid of Bakshesh! Not a bit of it. Let your own special "prince" back up your petition, let the Viceroy grant it, let the minister of state draw up the order, let the highest in the state be charged to carry it out in your behalf, and what have you got? Nothing ! Get a firman from the sultan himself, and you are no better off. Bakshesh has creatures, nominally filling some fifth-rate government posts, any one of whom can put a spoke in your wheel. Bakshesh is bribery and corruption, and without these nothing can be done. As the Nile water is to the land, so is bribery and corruption to the rulers and people of Egypt. Nothing is produced without it.

The people of the land of Egypt are probably the simplest, the most docile, and withal the most hard-working race in the world. They are naturally honest, for Orientals, to boot; but Turkish rule has ground all the best parts out of them, and contact with the riff-raff of the Levant has made them cheats and liars of the first water. Obedient and

easily led, they have improved upon the teaching of their masters, and the higher you go in the social scale the greater rascal you find. The simple fellah, or agricultural labourer, is not a bad sort of fellow; the sceikh, or chief of his village, is a trickster; the moudir, or magistrate of his district, is a bully and a rogue; he bey of his province is a ruflian; and his chief, the pasha, a scoundrel. It is the same, with a few exceptions, throughout the Ottoman Empire; the greater the power of doing good, the greater the extent of evil done.

Discussions upon the Suez Canal scheme have given rise to much moralising upon forced labour in Egypt. All labour in Egypt is forced, more or less, and always must be. A handful of beans and a cucumber, costing perhaps a penny in all, will feed an adult Arab for a day; a short spell of work will provide this, and why should he work for more? Suppose he save money, his sceikh, or moudir, or bey, or pasha hears of it, and straight he is asked for a loan, or the money is borrowed (?) by force. Would you or I care to work for more than our daily bread, if the policeman on our beat could come in and say that unless we lent him a sovereign he would walk us off to jail,—if the nearest county court judge might send word that unless we returned ten pounds by the messenger he would decide against us any action that any rascal thought proper to bring,—if a clerk in the war office might write and say that he thought we were going to be drawn as private soldiers and sent to the Gold Coast, but that a cheque for 50l. by next post might avert the doom? fancy not.

Still, and in spite of all, many fellahs do "work hard, speculate, and save money. What happens? They have no strong boxes, or trust in those who have: the coins are buried. Millions of pounds in gold are imported into Egypt every year, and yet money is always scarce, exchange on Europe being seldom less than two and a half per cent. The gold is in the country somewhere, but few of its holders dare to circulate it. It is paid for the produce of the earth, and back into the earth it goes; the hider dies, and the hoard is lost.

When the present Viceroy came into power, he declared that he would not countenance forced labour; but a week never passes in which it is not used on his own estates, and by his government for public works. The native weighers, lightermen, camel drivers, carters,¹ and others in the employment of European merchants, are frequently carried off to forced labour by order of the government, and even Bakshesh cannot always release them.

Twenty-four regular mail steamers enter and quit the port of Alexandria every month,

and there are frequently ten or a dozen British merchant steamers waiting at one time to be discharged or loaded. I can find no reliable! return of the number of other vessels which visit this port, but can vouch for its being always full of shipping. Yet there is no landing-stage, no pier, no jetty, no dock of any description; the Transit Company have a wharf which would be a disgrace to a river-side knacker's yard, and that is all. At the Arsenal, where goods may now be landed, there is one crane. At the Custom House there are two, the second being a temporary affair, rigged up by the crew of a Liverpool steam-ship. The cargoes are discharged into lighters, and from these huddled on shore anyhow. Take a ploughed field in Surrey, and employ a company of giants to cast pell-mell therein the contents of five hundred holds, and you may form a faint idea of the condition in which the so-called Custom House of Alexandria was kept for the four months preceding last March. Without an attempt at assortment, without the slightest protection from the weather or thieves, in a place open to all the world by land or sea, lay, piled together in inextricable confusion, bales of Manchester goods, cases of machinery and furniture, casks of oil and wine, packages of cutlery, tin-ware, iron rods, and plates, copper bottoms," crates of glass and crockery, boxes of wearing apparel, and all the other requisites of a country which manufactures nothing but the simplest and rudest commodity. It was quite possible to from a list of these various wares, for twenty per cent. of the packages had been smashed in the rough treatment they had received since they left the ship's side, and their contents were scattered abroad. Here, crushed under a main shaft, for want of which some engine in the interior had stopped work, that nothing but the rain could reach it, you might catch a glimpse of what was once a box of knives. There, you might find bales of " shirtings " and " sewed muslins " standing two feet deep in mud; and a cotton gin or a fire pump rusting in the damp. Everywhere confusion, neglect, and a sacrifice of property which increased day by day.

This mountain range of costly ruin covered some two acres of ground. The merchandise upon its verge could not be removed, because the streets and roads leading therefrom were all but impassable, and the government had seized for their own use all means of transport. The goods more in the centre could only be reached by a climber worthy of enrolment in the Alpine Club; could be moved by no power, because no power could be brought to bear for its removal. The rain poured down upon it, the mud soaked up into it, the thieves, official and non-official, picked and stole it; and there it lay, not for days and weeks, but for months. The merchants expostulated, and at last combined for the most part, and protested in terms more energetic and truthful than polite. The Viceroy appointed a commission, which fully carried out all that was required of it; — it was intended to do nothing, and it did it. An

energetic Englishman, the same who had erected the second crane in the Custom House, offered to clear out that Augean stable in a week, if he were given labour and his own way. He was just the man to do the work, therefore he was not allowed to undertake it. In the meantime, goods consigned to the Viceroy, including agricultural implements and cotton-cleaning machinery, to enable him to compete with his brother farmers up the country, were landed and passed, with other folk's labour and at other folk's expense, and King Bakshesh aided his special friends. The British Consul was requested to order that machinery intended for the Viceroy should be loaded on the top of cargoes from Liverpool, in order that it might be more speedily discharged. And the officer who made this request had served in the navy. Fancy steam-engines and hydraulic presses on the top of butter casks and fine goods! Imagine the trim of a ship thus loaded.

The exports are cotton, cotton seed, and, till lately, grain. Pick and clean your cotton, pack it, carry it to the platform of the railway station or the bank of the canal, and in ordinary countries you have done all that is necessary to ensure its despatch. Not so in Egypt. There, the sovereign of the country is its sovereign, and something more. He is a farmer and a manufacturer and a merchant upon his own account, and not for amusement or experiment, but for profit. The railway is his own, so is the canal, he can monopolise every truck upon the one and every boat upon the other; the water-carriage on the Nile is also at his command, and he uses all three unsparingly. All his own produce was whisked up to port before a single bale of that belonging to his competitors could be touched; it is even said that he used his men-of-war to transport cotton to Marseilles. Whilst the vice-regal bales were being thus disposed of, vulgar consignments remained stationary, and merchants who had contracted to deliver cotton in Liverpool by a stated day, and had the stuff ready at stations a few hours from Alexandria, were obliged to buy afresh to fulfil their obligations, because their own property was not forthcoming.

The Viceroy's requirements having been satisfied, a general scramble ensued. The means of transport provided by the monopolists of traffic in Egypt was utterly and hopelessly inadequate; all the stations on the railway, a single line, were choked up with cotton, and then King Bakshesh came out with a smile and said, " My friends, you have packed your goods very nicely, you have brought them to the railway and paid the fare — what will you give me if send them off' ? "

Now, be it remembered that the great increase in the trade and production of Egypt did not occur suddenly, or without due cause and warning; the first gun fired at Fort

Sumter was the signal to its ruler to be up and stirring. Its principal port is to a country what its front door is to a house. What is the use of having a magnificent mansion, if you cannot get in to furnish it? What is the value of a fertile country, if its produce be choked up on the banks of its harbour, unable to pass out of it? The harbour and port accommodation of Alexandria remains as it was twenty-eight years ago. A few new warehouses are being built for the Custom House, but how are the goods to be got into them?

Several descendants of the famous Pangloss are now settled in Egypt. There is Herr Pangloss, the great capitalist, who does little bills for its government; M. de Pangloss, Member (of course) of the Legion of Honour, who is part of the furniture of the Vice-regal antechamber; and the eminent British firm of Pangloss and Company, a member of which is "own correspondent " to a great London newspaper. According to these gentlemen the Viceroy is the best of all possible Viceroys, as indeed he is to them; and the administration of his one port, custom house, and railway, the best of all possible administrations. They have great faith in good intentions, have the MM. Pan gloss, and draw notes of admiration upon the future of Egypt, which we may be sure its government discount upon liberal terms, and which pass current in England and elsewhere. Our Panglosses all wear rose-coloured spectacles: but, as am not provided with a pair, see things in a different light, and set down — without malice — that which see, and ask only that it may be taken for what it is worth. But the plain truth is not worth much in Egypt.